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DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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DOCKET SECTION

November 11, 1996

Docket Clerk  
U.S. Department of Transportation  
Room PL-401  
Docket No. OST-95-950  
400 7th ST SW  
Washington DC 20590

OST-95-950-42

Subject **PASSENGER MANIFEST INFORMATION -  
NOTICE OF PROPOSED RULEMAKING  
DOCKET NO. OST-95-950 NOTICE NO. 96-23**

Dear Sir or Madam:

American Express Travel Related Services Company, Inc. ("American Express") is pleased to submit the following comments in the above captioned proceeding.

American Express is one of the largest travel agencies in the U.S. providing travel and travel related services worldwide. We thus have a significant interest in the proposed rule, which calls for airlines or their agents to collect specific passenger information on all flights out of or into the United States. By the DOT's own estimate, this rule will cost the travel agent community over \$4.3 million.

American Express estimates that the rule, as currently proposed, will cost us alone approximately \$1 million annually. This number is based on the average annual number of air transactions we ticket out of the U.S., and the additional agent time which will be required to obtain the proposed information on these passengers. In addition, as a worldwide travel agent with hundreds of travel locations outside the U.S. we will be required to obtain information on U.S. passengers traveling into the U.S. This poses an additional burden on us and other travel agents with worldwide operations.

Travel agents have historically operated on very thin margins, but since the imposition of the airlines commission cap in 1995 these margins have been eroded even further. It is safe to assume that if the airlines are allowed to shift the burden of collecting the mandated passenger information to travel agents that the airlines will not offer to cover our additional costs. Many travel agents may well not be able to survive this further restriction on their revenues and profits.

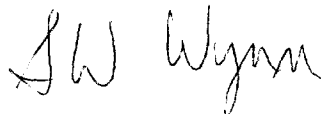
2 pgs.

American Express wholeheartedly supports the intent of the proposed rule, and agrees that it is necessary to provide a mechanism which will enable the dispensing of swift and meaningful information in the event of an air disaster. We submit, however, that there are less costly alternatives than imposing information collection requirements on travel agents. In the NPRM, the DOT has suggested one such alternative which is to have the airlines have passengers complete a form prior to boarding an international flight. This method seems to achieve the desired result in the least costly and most expeditious manner for all concerned. It also ensures that the information gathered is for passengers who actually board a flight. When American Express or any other travel agent books a passenger we have no way of knowing if the passenger actually boards the flight. It is routine, especially in the business travel environment, for passengers to change their travel plans at the last minute and to make those changes directly with the airlines. Having passengers complete a form before boarding ensures the accuracy of the manifest information and best serves the goal of the proposed rule.

In sum, by allowing airlines to shift the responsibility of collecting passenger manifest information onto travel agents, the proposed rule places an additional burden on an already strained industry and may have a particularly adverse impact on travel agents with global operations. We urge that the proposed rule be revised to mandate that airlines obtain this information by having passengers complete a form prior to boarding a flight.

We appreciate the DOT's consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "SW Wynn".

Sarah Woodfin Wynn  
Group Counsel

Handwritten initials, possibly "SW", in dark ink.